

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Digital Repository

Retrospective Theses and Dissertations

Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and
Dissertations

1970

Invisible walls

Earl Lennox Keyser Jr.
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Keyser, Earl Lennox Jr., "Invisible walls" (1970). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 77.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/77>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

INVISIBLE WALLS

by

Earl Lennox Keyser, Jr.

A Thesis submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Subject: English

Iowa State University
Of Science and Technology
Ames, Iowa

1970

This thesis has been accepted by the Department of English in lieu of the research thesis prescribed by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

INVISIBLE WALLS
CHAPTER ONE MONDAY

R-r-r-ring. Jeff reached for the phone with his right hand, pushing his black hair from his eyes with his left hand. "H-h-h-h-hello."

"Hello. This is Mr. Clayborne. May I speak to Jeff Nichols?"

"This is he."

"Fine. Uh, Dean Carver asked that I give you a call. He said that you're thinking of dropping out of school and that you gave your stuttering as the main reason for your academic failure."

"Yeah."

"Would you have a half hour to come over and talk to me about it?"

"Well, uh--"

"I promise you that I won't try to talk you into anything. I simply want to get to know you and find out a little about your problem."

"D-d-do I have to come?"

"No, you don't. There are no strings, and the Dean will not be informed of anything you say. I do, however feel it only fair to tell him that you did or did not come to see me."

"Would you give me a week to think about it?"

"Ordinarily, yes. But in this case, no. I say that because you are a junior, prime draft material, on the baseball team, and strongly considering withdrawing from school. I don't think you dare waste a week. But, of course, it's up to you."

"All right, I'll come."

"Fine. Would ten on Wednesday be convenient?"

"I can't. I have calc then."

"How about eleven?"

"Okay. Uh, wh-wh-wh-(silence)-how do I get there?"

"Room 421, Benson Hall."

"Okay, I'll be there."

"Hello, Ann?"

"Yes."

"This is Jeff. H-h-h-how are you?"

"Fine. How are you?"

"F-f-f-okay. Uh, Ann, well...do you wanta go to the

d-d-d-dance Saturday?"

"Who's holding it?"

"(Silence)"

"Jeff?"

"(Silence) The Delta Sigs."

"Okay. What time?"

"I'll pick you up at eight."

"Fine...uh, Jeff?"

"Yeah?"

"I want to talk to you about something."

"What?"

"I'll tell you Saturday."

"Why not now?"

"No. Saturday."

"Okay." Jeff replaced the receiver. He felt thirsty.

Jeff walked slowly into his room, eyes to the floor. As he crossed the threshold, a curious sound disturbed the air. "What the blazes?"

"Be quiet, and don't touch anything," said Mike.

"What are you doing?" said Jeff.

"I'm playing tiddleywinks with sewer lids."

"Bull."

"Would you believe pool with monkey testicles?"

"No comment."

"How about ping-pong with ball bearings?"

"What in the hell are you doing?"

"Making a STUDD."

Jeff quietly walked over to his desk and sat down.

Then, in a low voice he said, "What is a st-st-st-st-stud?"

"STUDD, with the accent on the d sound."

"Right. What is a STUDD?"

"What is a STUDD?" Mike repeated, almost to himself.

"Please, great god of the electronic heavens," Jeff raised his eyes toward the ceiling, "before I murder my roommate, allow him to tell me the origin and purpose of this strange and wonderful instrument sitting upon his chaotic workbench, commonly called a desk."

Mike set his tiny soldering iron gently on its resting stand and turned to Jeff. "STUDD is an acronym for Stevens Unbelievably Terrific Dialing Device."

"Oh." Jeff's six foot frame remained motionless.

"What it does is this." Mike straightened his shoulders and began to lecture. "When the device is connected into a telephone circuit, the following sequence of events will take place. First, I dial the number of an enemy, or friend; it depends on how I feel that day. Then, as soon as he answers, I hang up. But, in the meantime, the STUDD's

memory circuit has assimilated the number I just called."

"And then the fun begins?" said Jeff.

"Exactly, then the fun begins. As soon as he hangs up the receiver, the device counts to ten and dials him again. Naturally, when he picks up the phone there is no one on the line and he will hang up once more in disgust. And this will continue forever, unless I disconnect the device."

"But can't he do anything about it?"

"Not easily. He cannot call out unless he manages to get his call out in the ten seconds the device is waiting to call him again. And, even if he does that, the device will continue its work as soon as he hangs up."

"But it would have gotten a busy signal while he was talking."

"Right. And so it is designed to disconnect, count ten, and try again. Transistors have infinite patience."

CHAPTER TWO WEDNESDAY

Cautiously, Jeff pushed on the door labeled 421.

"Come in," said a bass voice.

"Uh, is this Mr. Clayborne's office?"

"Yes. Come right in and have a seat."

"Thanks." Jeff walked into the small office which was covered from wall to wall with posters--of magicians. Not only were there pictures of Houdini and Blackstone, but there were posters of men he had never heard of: Calvert, Birch, Boxley, Le Roy, Hermann. Yet, the man sitting at the desk looked anything but a magician.

"Sit down, sit down," said the red haired, blue-eyed giant, whose tremendous size was emphasized all the more by the small desk he sat behind.

"Are y-y-y-you the speech (silence) th-th-th-(silence) therapist?"

"Yes, I'm Mr. Clayborne." He paused to readjust his chair. "And you must be Jeff Nichols."

Jeff shook his head in assent.

"Pick a card," said the giant, as a pack of blue cards seemed to materialize in his hands.

"Uh, okay." Jeff withdraw a card and peeked at its index.

"Six of spades," said the giant without any preliminary

mumbo-jumbo.

"How did you know?" Jeff asked.

"Magic, of course." The giant paused for a few seconds and let silence invade the room once more.

"But there is no such thing," protested Jeff.

The man smiled. "No, maybe not in the sense of card trick magic, there's not. But there is another kind of magic that I did want to talk to you about."

"Uh, oh. Here comes the pitch," Jeff thought.

"No, I'm not going to give you a pitch of any kind."

Jeff started. "How did you know what I was thinking?"

The giant smiled again. "Simply a well educated and lucky guess."

"Oh."

"But seriously, Jeff, there is a strange kind of magic in the way you talk. And I thought you might want to discuss it. Also, as I mentioned, I'm told by the Dean that you want to quit school and think that your speech is the main problem.

"Yeah. My sp-sp-sp-sp-sp-(silence)-talking always causes me trouble. I can't recite in class, I get all funny talking on the phone, and my relationships with girls immediately go to pot when they discover I talk diff-diff-diff-differently."

"Uh-huh. I see what you mean."

"And, when you stutter on every other word, you just can't get a job or feel secure or any damn thing. At all!"

The big man smiled.

"What's so darn funny?"

"I probably shouldn't even tell you, since I wanted to discuss your coming in for therapy first, but it's this. In the last minute, with all the talking you've done, you have done what you call stuttering twice. Twice in at least fifty words. Which means that, on the average, you probably stutter less than four per cent of the time. And it is this that makes you stay up nights and kick the cat and beat your roommate and all kinds of other things. A lousy four per cent."

"But how do you know this is an average speaking situation?"

"I don't. In fact, it probably isn't. But even if we double the communicative stress, that's still only eight per cent, less than one word in twelve on which you have any trouble at all. And half of those pass for normal non-fluencies."

"Huh?"

"Normal non-fluencies. What everyone does between words. Things like 'um' and 'ah' and 'hmmm' and pauses and

stuff like that."

"Oh."

"So, your problem, in numerical terms is, relatively, small."

"But what about psychological terms?"

"Ay, there's the rub. To quote my favorite author."

"Huh?"

"Look. If you expend one quarter of your psychic energy worrying about something that involves less than ten per cent of your speaking energy, you can't put that energy to better uses, such as studying or," the giant's eyes sparkled slightly, "seduction."

"But what can I do? I can't just turn it off like you turn off a f-f-f-f-(silence)-f-f-f-spigot."

"True. But you can reduce the stream coming from that faucet to an absolute trickle. And then, maybe, disconnect the thing at its source."

Jeff sat back in the chair. "Are you certain?"

"No. I promise nothing. I can't. I can do only what you will let me help you do. And the basic responsibility is never going to be mine. It's going to always be yours."

"Okay, when can I get started?"

"You already have."

"Huh?"

"When you believe you can change how you talk, you can. And you believe that right now. Or you wouldn't be here."

Jeff smiled. "Right."

Jeff and Mike slowly mounted the five flights of stairs to their room.

"Got anything this time?" said Mike.

"Yes."

"What?"

"A spoon," said Jeff.

"Only?"

"No. I also got a Sopwith Camel and a Sherman tank."

"Don't be cute. What else did you get?"

"Nothing."

"Darn," said Mike. "We'll just have to get some help in this undertaking. In eighteen days, the best we've been able to steal was four knives, eight spoons, and two-and-a-half forks."

"Yeah, I swiped one of those crummy little pickle and hors d'oeuvre forks."

"Oh."

"But I had planned to get a service for sixteen. I guess I'll just have to be content with a service for twelve if, indeed, there's enough time left for that."

"And just how do you intend to do all of this?"

"Very simple. We'll commandeer Joe and Tommy and Roy and Sammy Lee and George into helping us." He paused for breath. "I've got something on every one of them; I'm certain they'll be more than happy to help us."

R-r-r-ring.

Jeff picked up the phone. "(Silence)."

"Hello?"

"(Silence)."

"Hello," said the voice again.

"Uh, yes."

"May I speak to Mr. Nichols, please?"

"This is he."

"Are you the young man who put in an application for a clerk's job at the Downey five-and-dollar store?"

"Y-y-y-y-y-yes."

"I see. Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you that the job is filled."

"Oh. Uh, can I ask you a question?"

"Go ahead."

"Was I turned down because I stutter?"

"No, that is, not exactly, that i-"

"Thanks." Click.

R-r-r-ring.

"Hello."

"Hello. Jeffrey?"

"Yes."

"This is your mother, dear."

"Hi, Mom."

"How are you?"

"Fine."

"Wonderful." Silence. "I'll call again next week."

"Okay, Mom, fine. Bye."

"Goodbye."

"But what does he intend to do with all of this silverware?" said Ann.

"You've got me," Jeff smiled.

"But why is he stealing it?"

"I guess just to show he can really do it."

"Then why are you helping him?"

"Because I'm his roommate." Jeff closed his book, and his plans for studying that night.

"That's all?" Ann's eyes began to get bug-like. "Do you realize what getting caught for stealing silverware can mean, Jeff? Do you really know?"

Jeff's brown wrinkled. "No. What is the penalty?"

"It's getting kicked out of the dorm and maybe KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL!"

"You're kidding."

"No, I'm not."

"Since when?"

"Since the head of the food service got tired of buying new silverware to make up for the stolen stuff."

"Well, I work in the kitchen. How come I never found out about it?"

"Because it isn't in the student handbook. They are waiting for a test case in the student senate when they catch someone."

"But that's not fair, is it?"

"Is it fair to steal 500 dollars worth of silverware from Simon Masters' College?" Ann challenged, her blue eyes throwing sparks.

Jeff slowly groped his way down the hall. The lack of lights was an unaccustomed situation, but not necessarily an unexpected one. Suddenly, he became aware of another entity groping its way down the hallway.

"Where is 4138?" a bull voice ordered.

"Just down the hall and to the le-"

"Thanks."

"Wait a second. That's my room and I'm going there, too."

"Who are you."

"Jeff Nichols."

"You must be the roommate."

"Huh?"

"The roommate of Michael Stevens."

"Yes, but...who are you?"

"Dean Carver."

"Uh-oh," thought Jeff. "I see," he said.

"That's just the problem. You don't see. And neither does anyone else in this dormitory. And neither do people in any of the other buildings on campus."

"I don't understand."

"I don't either. All I know is that twenty minutes ago I received a call at my home to the effect that the lights were going off all over the campus and that the culprit would be found in room 4138 of Magdalen Hall."

"But that's my room, and I didn't do it. I've been out on a date."

"What about your roommate? The tip said that the boy has blond hair that hangs in his eyes."

"That's Mike."

"All right, then. Let's go."

They continued down the hall in silence.

KNOCK KNOCK.

"Go away."

"Mr. Stevens. This is Dean Carver. Open this door.
Now."

"Nuts."

"Mr. Stevens, open this door!"

"Just a minute, sir. I'll open it." Jeff's hand went
to his pocket for a key.

"Thank you."

The door swung open to reveal a semi-darkened room. In
one corner was a completely nude young man sitting in Yoga
position on a towel which rested upon a manhole cover. This
strange object rested upon ten similar objects.

"What may the Green Swami do for you?"

"Mr. Stevens! Get dressed and explain to me the reason
for...this."

"No."

"Mr. Stevens."

"What may the Green Swami tell you?"

"Mike, answer the Dean's questions."

"No."

"Mr. Steven--"

"Oh, dry up. I am not responsible for your fucking lights going out. I'm responsible for the planning of the event, but you can't pin that on me. The actual mechanics are being run by a bunch of the other double-e boys. I only decided which buildings would go out first."

The dean stood in silent amazement.

"Furthermore, as soon as you entered the room, I signaled the troops to restore all power. This has been done. And, last but not least, no physical damage whatever has been done. We even had to rewire a couple of the fucking circuits because they were so old that the buildings might have burned down. Now please leave me alone."

"I see," said the dean, turning to leave.

"Do you, do you really?"

The dean turned, a look of subdued anger in his eyes. "Mr. Stevens, one day you will carry your pranks too far. I hope that I am still around when that day arrives." He turned. "Good night."

CHAPTER THREE FRIDAY

"Look, Jeff, it's like this." Mr. Clayborne took a strip of paper which had its two ends connected and began cutting it lengthwise. When he had finished, he had two loops, but they were interlocked.

"How did you do that?" Jeff asked.

"It's really unimportant. Just a circle with two half-twists in it. But the point is that, if we let the original paper band equal your stuttering, and your conscious effort to 'stop stuttering' be symbolized by cutting the paper band in half, we can come up with some very interesting results."

"Like what?"

"Well, for instance, we can see that you have not really eliminated the problem at all; you have doubled it. And the added part is linked with the old part."

"Huh?"

"Okay, look. When you first became concerned about your speech, you realized or were told by your parents that you must slow down, take a breath, take your time, pronounce each word more carefully, etc., etc., etc. And so you tried."

"Yeah, but--"

"But it really didn't help. Because now you were so anxious to do everything perfectly, the first time, that you

began being afraid of talking. And you began tensing your speech muscles in order not to have trouble."

"Right, but--"

"But this caused you even more trouble, because when you press your lips together very hard in an effort to say 'peanut', you are preventing your saying the word. You can not say the word because the phoneme, puh, involves a re-lease of air after the short stoppage. And by tensing your lips, there is no way that air can escape, except through your ears. And not too many people talk through their ears, nowadays."

"M-m-m. I see what you mean. But how am I going to really do anything about this?"

"We can start with talking about some of your fears, such as talking on the telephone. And, at the same time, we work on actual intentional stuttering behavior, so that we can recognize exactly what you are doing, thus attacking both sides of the problem. Sort of like cutting both of these loops." Which he did.

R-r-r-ring.

"Hello, Jeff?"

"Um."

"This is Mom."

"Um."

"How are you, honey?"

"F-f-f-ine"

"How's school?"

"Fine."

"How's the car running?"

"Fine."

"How's Ann?"

"Fine."

"That's good." Silence. "Well, I'll call you again next week. And your father says to study hard."

"Right, Mom. Bye." Jeff replaced the receiver and sat down to study, but he immediately returned to the phone and placed a call.

"Hello. Strand Theater box office."

"Can I speak to th-" Jeff's throat tightened.

"Yes?"

"(Silence)"

"Hello?"

"THE MANAGER."

"Oh. Okay. Just a minute. I'll get it."

Pause

"Hello."

"H-h-hello. I'm calling about the ad for a ticket sel-

ler and doorman?"

"Yes."

"Is the j-j-j-position still open?"

"Nope."

"Oh." Jeff replaced the receiver on the hook as the door burst open.

"Let's go kite flying."

"Go get layed."

"I'd love to, Jeff old boy, but I'm forced to sublimate my desires by physical exercise. And it seems to me that kite flying might have certain advantages."

"Name two."

"Mike held up two non-contiguous fingers. "Linda Sue and Ann."

"Ann is studying for a biology test."

"No, she's not."

"How do you know?"

"I just asked her."

"Impossible."

"All right, anything you say. But you can ask her yourself if you'll come over to the window."

"You mean--"

"Of course. Now get a jacket and let's get going."

The blue of the sky nearly matched the blue of Ann's dress, and Jeff thought that he had rarely, if ever, seen her look so nice. Her auburn hair, cut shoulder length, waved in the breeze as she stood trying to attach the string from Mike's ball of cord to a red and white kite.

"Hey, Linda Sue," Mike called to his girlfriend. "Let me use your hanky for a tail for the kite."

"No, suh. You aren't using any of mah handkerchiefs for any ole kaht tail."

"Poor sport." Mike looked up at the sky. "It's going to rain in the not too distant future. We'd better get this gremlin aloft immediately, if we intend to do any kite flying at all today. Come on, Ann, don't you have anything we could use?"

"How about Kleenexes?"

"Very funny. How about you, Jeff?"

"Well, we could always unbraid the sweater that my grandmother gave you when you came to visit last Christmas."

"All right, you guys, now let's get with it. There's got to be a rag or a piece of tail around here somewhere."

The wet pavement reflected the lights of campustown as Jeff stared moodily out the window. Mike had been gone since supper and the room had become so quiet that it was

impossible to study. Suddenly, the door burst open and Mike entered, dripping water from his raincoat, and said, "Let's go get a beer."

"Uh-uh. Not after last week's performance. You may be smart, Stevens, but you are definitely crazy."

"Oh, come on, Jeff. Who's gonna know?"

"You, me, and half the county if you repeat your performance of last weekend."

"Aw, you're just a poor sport. All I did was yell a few obscenities at a passing patrol car."

"What about the can of shaving cream which you used to decorate the dean's window with, and that we only found out about because of the picture in the school paper?"

"What's a little innocent fun? Besides, the dean's picture window really needed washing."

"Maybe so. But suppose you'd been caught, Mike. What then?"

"Quibble, quibble, quibble."

"No, not quibble. There is no way in the world that I am going to go drinking with you."

"Even if I bring Linda Sue?"

"Forget it. Not even if you bring Linda Sue."

"And promise to be home by twelve?"

"Well..."

"And give you all my money so that you, and only you, can determine how much I drink?"

"All right, I give up. I'll go."

"Wonderful. The car is waiting outside."

"But you don't have a car."

"No, but you do."

"My car is in the parking lot all the way acro--ONE OF THESE DAYS I AM GOING TO BREAK YOUR NECK!"

"Hi, Linda Sue," Jeff said, opening the car door.

"Whah, hello there, Jeffrey. How've you been?"

"Just fine, thanks." He turned to Mike. "Is this the full crew? Just you, me, Linda Sue, Gordie, and Jasper?"

"That's all. Everyone else had to study."

"Figures."

"And don't y'all be one bit bothered by mah bein' here. Y'all just call me 'Bill' and pretend ah'm one of the boys."

"Okay, Linda, Sue, anything you say. But," Mike turned to the other guys, "don't anyone else get overly chummy with my new 'boy' friend. And no cute cracks."

"Right," the guys said in chorus.

The strobe light overhead accented the movements of the slim dancer on the stage, the drinkers clapped in time to

her contortions or, occasionally, heckled her.

"Siddown, ya big baboon," Mike shouted.

"Mike, sit down," said Jeff.

"Aw, go soak your head in the rest room," said the big guy at the front table.

"Go play in traffic, you noisy bum!" said Mike.

The bartender picked up a megaphone. "Hold it! You guys go talk this over quietly, or I'll throw you both out."

Mike turned to look at the bartender, then back at the wrestler he had been insulting, then back at the bartender. "Okay, I guess I just wasn't thinking. Sorry about the disturbance." He looked at the wrestler. "I really wish you wouldn't heckle the dancer, but I'm sorry I wasn't more tactful."

The big guy stood there, slightly surprised once more, after the initial surprise of a skinny kid telling him to sit down. "Well, all right. I guess maybe I been drinking a little heavy. An' I really didn't mean for ya to get your head wet."

"That's okay," said Mike, sitting down.

"You have more brains and guts than are good for you," Jeff said. "You ought to know better than to insult a heavyweight wrestling champion."

Mike smiled. "There are twenty feet and three tables

between him and the door. There are ten feet and no tables between us and the door. I was prepared."

"Yeah, right." Jeff turned towards the bar. "Two more at table ten," he called.

"Have you finished your calculus?" Mike asked.

"Have you finished your double-e lab?" replied Jeff.

"No fair answering a question with a question."

"Isn't it?"

"Cut that out. That's my line."

"Aw, lost a line. Too bad."

"Jeffrey Nichols, I think I'm going to see that you get another purple you-know-what."

"You wouldn't."

"Try me."

"Okay, I wi-wait a minute!" Jeff looked steadily at Mike. "You've never had one."

"Of course I have."

"When?"

"Last week, just after the house meeting."

"Bull."

"I did, too," Mike protested.

"Uh-uh. You were a candidate, but Myron won. And that means that at the next meeting, or before..."

"You wouldn't. Not to your best friend and roommate."

Jeff's eyes sparkled as he said, "I recall an incident two weeks ago where an unsuspecting roommate was attacked while he was asleep. And I think I know who arranged that."

"B-b-b-b-but-"

"And stuttering will get you nowhere. That's my line."

Mike paused to take a drink. Then, replacing his mug on the rough, brown table, said, "Hey, tell me something."

"What?"

"How come, when you're drinking, at least until you are totally polluted, you don't stutter?"

"I don't know," said Jeff.

"You must have some idea, though."

"Well, I do. Or I should say that Don does."

"Don?"

"Don Clayborne, the speech therapist at school."

"So what does he say?"

"Well, he says that when I'm drunk I forget about how I'm talking and concentrate upon what I'm saying. Because of this, I don't do things like avoiding words 'cause I think I may stutter on them. Then, when I don't stutter on them, my confidence is built up and I have less trouble and so on and so on." Jeff paused for a drink.

"Then why, if your confidence keeps being built up, doesn't your stuttering disappear?" said Mike.

"Because my confidence doesn't stay built up."

"Huh?"

"Eventually, when I'm talking in what I consider an acceptable manner, I start to notice this. And I start trying to hold on to my success. So I tense up just a little bit in order not to have trouble, which makes me stumble, which I notice and tense up more, and the thing becomes a descending spiral. Every bumble sets the stage for another, until I'm in a full tailspin and speechless."

"Then why not just stay drunk all the time?"

Jeff raised his eyes toward the rafters.

"And I can out-think, out-fox, and out-screw anybody in this whole damned dormitory."

Jeff looked out the door at his roommate who stood, wearing only his jockey shorts, in the middle of the hall.

"Mike."

"Not only that, I can make cows give chocolate milk, pigs give non-shrinking bacon, and hens lay polka dotted eggs."

"Mike, come into the room," Jeff said.

"In addition, I can wrestle alligators with one hand tied behind my back, grin down possums from atop far mountain ridges, and maintain a hammerlock on a seven foot black

bear for more than three point one two seven hours."

"Mike!"

"Furthermore, I have made love to more beautiful women than any man except Don Juan, and I'm not sure about him."

"You have three seconds to get into this room, Stevens," said Jeff from the doorway.

"I also can drive a sports car at one hundred and thirty miles per hour around a track which has been greased with the wax taken from under a camel's toenails, while at the same time eating a fourteen dip ice cream cone. And I do this magnificent feat while bound hand and foot and blindfolded. In fact, I-"

"One."

"-am so fan-"

"Two."

"-tastic that here i-"

"Three." At this point, Jeff picked up Mike by the waist, threw him over his shoulder, and carried him in to bed, to sleep off the effects of two point eight one four mugs of beer.

CHAPTER FOUR SATURDAY

Clangclangclangclang

The fire station bell threatened to tear holes in the firemen's heads. Thud, thud, snap, snap. The sound of boots and suspenders was punctured only by an occasional curse as a rumble of gasoline engines rose thru the hole in the floor and a smell of exhaust began to taint the room. Then, with men still descending the brass pole, the first of the water dragons began to move toward the door. Within moments it would be screaming its heart out as it raced toward its adversary, whose graceful tongues were busily consuming a factory.

Clangclangclangclang

"Get up!"

Jeff's eyelids slowly jacked themselves up and he became cognizant of two blue eyes staring at him.

"Get up, you lazy bastard," said Mike. "It's Saturday; it's noon. And we're supposed to go kite flying at one."

"Uh-uh."

"Up!" said Mike. But when there was no response, smiled, "Okaaaay." A skinny hand reached up and grabbed the pillow from under Jeff's head.

"Rat," said Jeff.

"Get up!"

"No."

The hand returned and proceeded to drag the covers from Jeff's clenched fist.

"Last night you begged me to get you up by twelve. It is now 11:58."

"I've still got two minutes."

"Bull."

"I do," Jeff insisted, pulling the cover over his head.

"One of them is just gone."

"Oh." Jeff peeked from under the covers. "Will you give me a kiss if I get up?"

"Sure, right on the--"

"Never mind."

"Well, you said--"

"I know." Jeff swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

"Beautiful legs you have," said Mike.

"Obscene gesture to you," Jeff retorted.

"The same, unwashed," said Mike.

The red kite swam lithely through the air currents, its yellow tail wig-wagged a sign of enjoyment to the group of students on the ground. And the kids cheered as Mike skillfully maneuvered his kite next to a purple kite being flown

by a bunch of frat rats and their girl friends.

"Get it, Mike, get it," cried the girl beside Mike.

"Yeah, get it, Mike," said Jeff to himself silently.

Then, with a flick of the wrist, Mike made his kite cross the other and when their strings touched, Mike gave his string a sharp tug.

"What happened?" screamed one of the sorority girls, as their kite, suddenly freed from its moorings, rose higher and higher, disappearing into the clouds.

"Golly, that's funny," said Mike. "That's never happened before."

And Jeff smiled as he lowered his movie camera. He had had barely enough time to zoom in on the N and S string cutter before the adversary kite had been liberated.

"Grab him!"

The voice of Mike aroused Jeff from his nap, although the hands gripping him would have done the same thing in another second.

"Hold him down, you guys. I can't get the job done right if you don't."

"What the blazes?" Jeff said as he opened his eyes to see four big guys holding him down to his bed, while Mike pulled up his sweater and began to mark on his chest with a

felt tip pen."

"Quiet, infidel," said Mike as he continued to draw on Jeff's chest.

"WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

"Stop wiggling, Nichols."

"What are you guys doing?" Then Jeff looked down at the artist's work. "Oh, no, you don't. Not again," he yelped, and began to fight.

"Hold him, boys. I'm almost done."

"You crummy bastard. You wait. I'll get you if it's the last thing I ever do."

"It might be if you don't settle down so I can finish."

"You miserable insect. And to your roommate, yet."

"All right, guys, let him up."

Jeff jumped from his bed and walked ruefully to the mirror, where he gazed at a poor caricature of a male sex organ.

"You are now the only member of the order of the Purple Prick to have been so honored twice. Aren't you lucky?"

"I'll g-g-(silence)-get you."

"Well, gotta go," said Mike as he waved goodbye from the doorway. "Don't leave that on too long, or you'll have a dandy rash."

"Thanks for the advice."

"Anytime, my boy, any time."

Jeff picked up a towel and threw it at Mike.

"How did it all get started, Jeff?" said Linda Sue.

"Oh, i-i-i-i-i-(silence)-it all began about three w-w-(silence)-w-w-w-weeks ago when I was studying to take a test to pass out of a course." He took a drink from his coke as he looked around the new student lounge.

"Mmmm. French 221."

"R-r-r-r-yes. Anyway, this one freshman kept p-p-p-p-p-p-p-pestering me. And so I took out a felt tip pen from my desk and said, "Tom, if you don't leave the room in ten seconds, I'm going to take this pen and draw a prick right in the middle of your chest."

"And-"

"And he left. But of course we had to carry out the threat, and so the following week we grabbed him and gave him the works. And now it's caught on all over campus."

"Y'all must be foolin' me."

"No, I'm not. People are getting grabbed all the time now and marked up."

"And today they turned on you?"

"Right. For the second time."

Linda Sue giggled.

"Hey, Jeff!" said Gordie from the doorway.

"What?"

"Wanna go have a beer?"

"N-n-no. Thanks."

"All right."

"Hey, Jeff!"

"What?"

"Wanna go out broad jumping?" said Sammy as he passed down the hall in search of an i.d.

"N-n-n-no, thanks."

"Okay."

"Hey, Jeff!" called Rich from across the hall.

"What?"

"Wanna go study?"

"Uh-uh."

"Hey Jeff!"

"What?"

"Wanna go to Hell?" Mike's faced emerged from the bath bathroom door and a cloud of steam followed.

"No, I'm already there."

"Funny man."

"Of c-c-c-c-c-c-naturally."

"And even funnier now." Jeff ducked as a sopping washcloth smacked against the wall where his head had been.

"Ha, ha,ha," he sneered.

Mike glowered and returned to the bathroom, his towel limply remaining behind where it had fallen when he wound up for his throw of the washcloth.

"Now what was it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Well, Jeff, it was about our dating."

Jeff ~~said~~ nothing, waiting for Ann to continue.

"I think you're being a bit too persistent. You see, I would like to date around more, and see what else is available and let you do the same."

"In other words, you want to break up."

"Not exactly. We haven't really been going together. Not really."

"We haven't?" Jeff asked, brow wrinkling. "We sure made a good show of it then."

"But you can't consider once-a-week dating and an occasional study date as going together."

"The heck I can't. I'm the one who takes you to all the dances. I'm the one who takes you out for dinner. I'm

the one you go parking with."

"But you're not the only one, and besides--"

"And besides, what?"

"Well, I...never mind, forget it."

"Never mind what?"

"Well, I...uh--"

"Don't like the way I talk."

"Not exactly, Jeff, but..."

"But I'm really a nice guy, and dress nicely, and have clean habits, and dance pretty well, and have fairly good grades, and have a fair build, and you're sure some other girl might l-l-l-l-like me, but you're not the one. Is that what you're trying to say?"

Ann looked pleadingly at him for a second. "Yes."

CHAPTER FIVE MONDAY LATE MARCH

"But do you see the real problem, Jeff?"

"Sure, Mr. Clayborne, I see."

The red-haired giant leaned back, hands clasped behind his head. He stared at the ceiling. Then, suddenly leaning forward, he said, "Spell it out for me."

"Okay. It's very simple. Because I stutter, Ann doesn't want to date me. Now whether this has anything to do with my general likeability, I don't know. But I do know that girls don't like guys who come to them, sc-sc-sc-screw up their faces, blink th-th-th-th-(their)-their eyes, and can't even ask them for a date."

"Then how do you get any dates at all?"

"I don't. Except for Ann. It's not too hard asking someone out the first time, but after they get to know me, and know that I stutter, it's just impossible."

"How do you know that they know you stutter?"

"It's obvious, isn't it?"

"Not really."

"Bull."

"No, no. I'm very serious. Here, listen. I'll play you a tape of eight speakers reading a passage from a Steinbeck novel. I'll bet you a cup of coffee that you can't pick out more than two of the stutterers. And you may not

do that well."

"You're on."

"All right. Listen."

"Hello, Ann?"

"She's out."

"Tell her I'm d-d-d-(silence)-down eating."

"Okay."

Click

"Hello, Ann?"

"She's eating."

"Oh."

Click

"Hello, Ann?"

"Nope."

Click

"Ann?"

Click

Click

Mike sat on the edge of his top bunk, feet dangling, strumming a guitar. "One of these days I'm gonna settle down, gonna get me a wife and a two bit ranch. And when ah'm finally ready, I'll have me a family."

"Hey, that's pretty good, Mike," said Jeff.

Mike looked up from his instrument for a second. His face took on an unaccustomed look. "Thanks."

"When did you take up the guitar, though?"

"Oh, I've been playing for a long time. I was even a part of a folk quartet when I was a kid." He put the guitar down.

"Don't stop. I really like your playing."

"Thanks, Jeff. But I've really got to study. I just borrowed this from a guy down the hall."

"Oh." Jeff looked over as Mike jumped from the bed and headed down the hall.

R-r-r-ring. Jeff turned to answer the telephone.

"Mr. Nichols?"

"Yes."

"This is Dean Carver calling. I wonder if I might speak with you in my office?"

"Of course, sir. What time?"

"Would four this afternoon be convenient?"

"Fine."

"All right, I'll see you then."

"Dean Carver?"

"Come in, Jeff, and have a seat. And don't panic," he added. "It isn't about you that I wish to talk."

"Well, sir, then who is it?"

"Quite frankly, it's your roommate."

"You mean Mike?"

"Yes, Mike."

"What's he done now?"

"Nothing. And that's what worries me."

"I beg your pardon."

"It's the fact that Mike has not been responsible lately for an explosion, a missing gargoyle, or bubble bath in the fountain."

"Well, he has been gone an awfully lot."

"Do you know where?" The dean gently balanced his pipe on his extended finger.

"No, sir. I don't. But what difference does it make?"

"It's like this, Jeff. First, you must treat anything I tell you as strictly confidential."

"Okay," Jeff replied in a puzzled voice.

"Mike has no parents."

"No parents?"

"That's right. When Mike was a small child his father disappeared while working on a top-secret government project. His death was never confirmed. And, shortly thereafter, his mother committed suicide by an overdose of sleeping pills."

Jeff winced, as though directly injured.

"After that he was farmed out to grandparents, who are all since dead. And there are no aunts and uncles, since both of his parents were only children. When Mike's parents died, it was found that a large trust fund had been set up for him. He was to receive five thousand dollars every year to cover his living expenses. Since I was a close personal friend of Mike's father, I was appointed his legal guardian."

"Isn't that pretty unusual?"

"Yes, very."

"Does Mike live with you, then, outside of school?"

"Yes, occasionally. And sometimes he stays with other members of the faculty or, now that he is older, he often goes home over vacations with a friend."

"That's why he was able to come home with me over the Christmas holidays!"

"Right. And that's why we were so happy to have you

ask him home for the holidays. You suspected that he had no family to celebrate with, of course, but you did not know why."

"Well, he never gets any mail except from electronic supply companies and stuff like that. I had never seen a letter from parents or a relative of any kind and I had really wondered. But, of course, I just didn't want to ask him."

"That's the story, Jeff." The dean sat back in his chair. "And I wish I knew how it will end."

"I still don't follow, sir."

"Look, maybe I wasn't very clear. You see, Mike is one of the most brilliant students we have ever had. But because he is so smart, we just can't keep him busy. And so he pulls the many stunts he does."

Jeff smiled.

"Now he has never injured anyone, in fact he's usually very careful that no one will get hurt. But now he's halted his various devilments. And we don't know why."

"Mike could graduate this quarter if he chose, but he won't because he wants to stay the whole four years and get a triple major. However, we must know where he spends his time."

"Okay, sir. I'll try to find out for you."

The dean extended a hand. "Thank you, Jeff. Thank you very much."

Mike laid his pencil down and turned to Jeff. "Then why do you keep going there, if all you feel is frustrated and pissed off when you come out?"

"I don't know, Mike. It's just that the guy does seem to know what he is talking about."

"Well, if he knows what he is doing, then why are you complaining and considering quitting therapy? Look, roommate, you're the one with the problem, not him. Maybe he really feels that you aren't doing enough."

"Maybe I'm not, but I've got other things to do, too."

"Like?"

"Like school and Ann and making movies and reading and baseball and--"

"And maybe what he's trying to do is to get you to decide on which is really most important to you right now."

"Well, school is most important, obviously."

"And then?"

"And then I suppose Ann."

"And then?"

"Uh..."

"And then your speech, if I can believe what you say."

"R-r-r-right."

"So, get on the stick."

"So, go soak your head."

"I would, but I've got a better idea," said Mike, quickly opening his desk drawer, pulling out a squirt gun, and beginning to squirt Jeff, whose anger dissolved to laughter as he reached for his own squirt gun.

CHAPTER SIX WEDNESDAY

"Here, Jeff. Pick a card."

"Okay."

"Now, replace it in the deck and shuffle the cards."

Jeff did so. "Done."

"Now think of the card."

"I am."

"It's black and...it's probably a spade. Yes, it's definitely a spade. In fact, it's the ace of spades."

"How did you know?" Jeff asked incredulously.

"Simple. Look at the deck."

Jeff took the cards and spread them face-up on the table. "They're all alike. Every one is an ace of spades," he cried.

"That's right."

"But that's not fair. You cheated."

"Did I? I don't think so." The therapist stopped talking for a moment and retrieved his cards. "Look, Jeff, in my magic I only promise to entertain you. Whether I fool you or not is really secondary. And how I do it is completely irrelevant!"

"Okay, I'll buy that. But what is your point?"

"Point?"

"Sure, you always have one."

"True. In this case, I'm pointing out something in reverse. You assumed that the pack was composed of all different cards. And it was not."

"So?"

"In speech situations, you assume just the opposite. You assume that, for instance, all telephones are alike. And you assume that you will stutter every time you pick one up."

"But I do."

"Bull..."

"I do."

"Bull."

"All right. Show me."

The therapist reached under the desk pad for a piece of paper. "How much trouble did you have talking to Ann on the phone?"

"Not too much."

"How about calling and asking for a theater time?"

"A lot."

"How about calling home?"

"Very little."

"So how do you differentiate?"

"Well, I...uh...I just don't know."

"But how?" demanded the therapist.

"I don't know."

"Ah-hah!"

"Whadda ya mean 'Ah-hah'?"

"I mean you really don't know. Your judging is strictly intuitive; it's not quantified."

"Well, no! Of course not," said Jeff.

"And so, if it is not quantified, you really don't know when you have the most trouble, although your guesses probably are right."

"Well, if my guesses are right, then why worry?"

"I worry because, although the amount of disfluency in your speech is different under different telephone situations, your general reaction to the telephone is the same."

Jeff thought a second. "Okay. Maybe so. But how do I change that?"

"One good way is to confront what you are afraid of."

"All right." Jeff picked up the telephone on the therapist's desk.

"Now then, start calling theaters asking for the time of the show. But, each time you call, think about talking easier; don't think about not stuttering."

"Right."

"When's the test, Mike?" said Jeff.

Mike looked up from his book with a pained expression.

"Tomorrow."

"Then why are you studying now?"

"I always study for a test the day before."

"Bull."

"I do," Mike insisted.

"Bull--"

"Oh, all right. It's because this is the first course I ever had that the guy goes over so fast you couldn't even take notes on a tape recorder. The other day he made a remark about sleeping in class; he said he'd make very certain no one slept through this next test. And that means trouble. Ergo, I am studying."

"Well, well. The millenium has come."

Jeff picked up the receiver and dialed. A moment passed and the other phone was answered.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Ann?"

"No, she's out."

"Oh. Well, tell her Jeff called."

"Uh..."

"Yes."

"I don't think she wants to talk to you any more."

"How come?"

"I don't know."

"Then how do you know she doesn't want to talk to me?"

R-r-r-ring. Jeff quickly removed the receiver from its hook.

"Hello, Jeffrey?"

"Oh, hello, Mother."

"How have you been, sweetheart?"

"Fine, Mom."

"How's Ann?"

"Okay."

"How's Mike?"

"Okay."

"Do you need anything?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, study hard and write us once in a while."

"Right, Mom. Bye."

"Hey, Mike!"

"What?"

"Where are you going?"

"Out to kill lemmings."

"But lemmings only appear in Europe."

"So I have to work at a distance."

"Bull. Now, where are you going?"

"Would you believe I'm going hunting for wild Scottish
Marsh Turkeys?"

"No."

"Oh." Mike looked crestfallen.

"Where are you going? Or, more to the point, are you going out and, if so, may I come along?"

"You have calculus to do."

"I know, but I can face this stuff for only so long, and then every curve on a graph begins to have an obscene reference to it."

Mike stood silently for a moment, seeming to become almost catatonic. "I guess so. But you have to make me a promise."

"Sure."

"You aren't to tell Dean Carver where I go."

"Tell Dean Carver?"

"Look at your wristwatch."

"What?" Jeff frowned, then raised his right wrist to eye level.

"Notice anything different about it?" asked Mike.

"No, except that the crystal isn't as scra-WAIT A MINUTE! This isn't my watch. It's got the same strap, and

it's got my name engraved on the back, but it's different."

"Uh-huh. That's about the size of it. It's the same, but it's different."

"Roommate, just what did you do to my wristwatch?"

"Oh, I've got the old one put away in my drawer. But the new one is much more interesting." Mike's eyes lit up with the fire Jeff saw only rarely. "Wanna know how it's different?"

"I'm afraid to ask."

"Okay, fine."

"But I will. How is this watch different?"

"That watch, that splendid little timepiece, is one of the miracles of modern day electronics. Through the wonders of miniaturization and transistorization, I have produced a tiny broadcasting unit which serves very nicely for range-finding purposes."

"In other words, you were following me."

"To put it crudely, yes."

Jeff sighed. "Okay, you win. I won't tell. One question, though. How did you know what I said to the dean and what he said to me?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson. Once I knew where you were, I zipped over to the administration building, seduced the secretary out of a pass, then hid in the broom closet

next to the dean's office and used a modified hearing aid to listen through the wall."

"My Father in Heaven! Only you!"

"True, true. Shall we go?"

"Hey, guys. It's Mr. Music!" The little boy jumped from the chair he had been standing on in his effort to reach what appeared to Jeff to be a cookie jar.

"Mr. Music! Mr. Music! Yeah!" yelled another boy.

"Mista Music, Mista Music," cried a third.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" asked Mike, looking down at the little black boy pulling on his jacket.

"Will ya sing the song about the dagron?"

"You mean dragon, don't you?"

"Yeah, Poof, the magic dagron."

"Okay," he smiled. "Go get me the guitar from your housefather."

The boy turned and ran out the door.

"So that's it. You've been working as a part-time housefather in a home for problem children."

Mike looked at him intently. "Wrong. They aren't problem children; they're children with problems."

"What's the differnece?"

"One heck of a lot." The little black boy appeared at

Mike's side with a battered guitar. "I'll tell you later."

"Awright, youse guys. Siddown or I'll knock your fug-gin' blocks off. Got that?" The little black boy glowered at the other nine residents of the cabin. "Awright, Mista Music, go ahead 'n play. But if ya get any shit, you just tell me."

"Okay, Carl, I will," grinned Mike. He turned to the group sitting on the floor in front of him. "What would you like to hear first?"

A chorus of voices arose, but all were drowned out by a chubby black boy whose bass voice easily overpowered the others' sopranos. "De fox song. I wanna her de fox song."

"Hey, dum dum," said Carl. "Ya gotta call him sir."

"Aw go soak your head in a bucket of lye."

"Well, screw you."

"HOLD IT! Now we agreed to cut that kind of thing out if I were going to sing for you guys. And I wasn't kidding when I meant cutting it out."

"We're sorry, Mr. Music," the boys chorused.

"That's better. But don't forget." Mike smiled, began to pluck the strings gently, then began a simple but quite competent version of Puff, the Magic Dragon. Jeff watched in awe as his roommate went skillfully from one song to another, from popular favorites to Negro spirituals, from a

simple song for fun to a song with a lesson. And the boys sang along when they could, listened quietly when they couldn't.

Then Jeff began to notice a change in the atmosphere. Where Mike had been singing happily and loud before, he was now nearly drowned out by the guitar. And even that was subdued.

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrow," Mike sang. Jeff felt his eyes fill with tears and looked up to notice the boys moving slowly in until they were gathered very closely around Mike. Every one of them seemed to be singing, black and white equally. Then Jeff noticed Mike's face.

For the first time in two years, Jeff saw that Mike was crying. Not obviously, but there were tears falling down his cheeks.

The music stopped, and Mike laid the guitar down. He looked up and said, "Okay, you guys, that's enough for now." He smiled, "Why don't you go get your school work and we'll talk about any problems you are having. Okay?"

"Okay, Mista Music." Carl spoke for the group.

Jeff looked with awe at his roommate. "Mike, that was one of the most fantastic things I have ever seen. You had those kids so much together that they make the apostles look

like amateurs."

"Oh, come on. Sure, they like to sing, but that's all there is to it, really."

"All there is! My God, Mike. You are really talented at handling kids."

"Thanks for saying that, Jeff."

"I'm not just saying it. But, what I really want to know is, how did you get into all-"

"Hey, Mr. Music, you gonna help me with my algerba?" a small boy interrupted.

"Sure, Tony." Mike looked at Jeff. "I'll tell you the whole story, someday. But, I've got to help the kids now."

"Okay, fine. I think I'll go back to the room. See you at supper."

"Check."

The black and blue feelings of his mind began to ache, and Jeff turned and looked at his roommate. "Mike?"

"What?" The object of the question leered at him.

"Do you want to go to Chicago?"

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"What do you mean, why not?"

"Well, why not go to Chicago? I mean, there is not any

reason for not going to--You bastard! Do you want to go?"

"No."

"All right. I'm going in the morning. Cover for me."

"Cover what?"

"My trail."

"I won't do any such thing. I think you should study."

"Oh, come on. Who's kidding whom?" Jeff set his pencil down. "I'm not making the grades here and we both know it. So, the way I figure it, I'll go to Chicago and get a job, earn my keep for a while and, when I've figured out what I want, come back to school."

"What about Uncle Sam? What about Dean Carver? What about Mommy-wommy? And Daddy-waddy? And how about old Horny Han--"

"Go screw yourself."

"Unfortunately, that anatomical feat is beyond the range of my talents. You, however, ought to be able to accomplish the feat with only minor pain. All you need do i--"

"Shut up."

"OOOOh! We've made the tiger mad."

"I'll tiger all over you if you don't shut up."

"Study." A moment's silence prevailed. "Gotta weed?"

"What?"

"Do you have a cigarette?" Mike asked.

"No," said Jeff.

"Do you know where there are any?"

"No."

"Do you care?" asked Mike.

"No."

"Would you like to watch a master get a cigarette?"

Jeff looked up from his calculus book for the fifth time, glanced at the clock's overlapping hands on the 3, and said, "No!"

"Now, now. Don't make noise during quiet hours."

A finger was raised.

"But I will show you anyway how to achieve the production of one little weed. Watch carefully." Mike rose from his chair, walked to the door, opened it, stuck his head out into the hall, and screamed, "Dean Johnson sucks blue-green camel tits."

Three doors opened in swift succession, as Mike closed the door he had looked out from. Then, after waiting five seconds, re-opened it and strolled into the hall. He was greeted by a group of sleepy looking late studiers.

"What's all the noise?" he asked.

"Don't know," said the proctor. "I guess somebody had a little too much to drink."

"I see," said Mike. Then, turning to one of the group

who had a bulging shirt pocket, said, "Hey, Joe. Can I bum a cigarette from you?"

The boy sleepily gave Mike a cigarette, then wandered back to his room. And Mike re-entered his own room, with a smile on his face, to be greeted by Jeff's disgusted look.

CHAPTER SEVEN FRIDAY

"But how is thinking about how I'm talking going to help my stuttering? I thought you said that my whole problem is that I pay too much attention to how I talk, and I overreact to any non-fluencies."

"Correct. To a point. And the point is that you should be paying attention to what you are doing whenever you do what you call stuttering. I want you to become aware of the tremor in your lip, the explosion of air when you hold the 'p' sound for an inordinate amount of time, the closing of your eyes whenever you think you are going to stutter."

"But why?"

"Because it is these things, these actions, that make up a large part of what you call stuttering. By working to eliminate these habits which only prevent you from speaking, not help you to speak, you can do so."

"But when I close my eyes for an instant, it makes the block go away, and I can speak just fine."

"Not really. You see, Jeff, this becomes a trick. But unlike my magic, it creates only harm. You have become oriented to the idea that an eyeblink, for instance, can serve as a momentary distraction of thought, and allow you not to stutter. But, something goes wrong. Do you know what?"

"Yeah. It stops working after a few times.

"Right. That trick, and any other, eventually fail."

"Then why do I continue to do it?"

"Why does anyone continue to do anything? Because it worked once and, they hope, it will work again. If they would only pay attention to the original problem, though, they could get much further."

"I don't know whether I follow you."

"Well, it's like a baseball player trying to hit the ball. If he cracks his knuckles just before going to the plate and then, by chance, gets a triple, he may try cracking his knuckles again the next time. And if he gets a hit he may well come to believe that the cracking of knuckles has a mysterious effect on the baseball. We call this superstitious behavior."

"But the knuckle bit has no effect on a baseball!"

"Right. But to him it does. And so he continues."

"And--"

"And then he may try something else, like gritting his teeth. In time, he will have a whole repertoire of useless actions which do not add, and may detract, from his ability to hit the ball."

"But how does this fit my speech?"

"Well, you think you are going to have trouble, so you

blink your eyes. Maybe this works once or twice. But not always, and less and less. Now, if we work consciously to eliminate these avoidance behaviors, we eliminate, by definition, some of the stuttering problem."

"Okay."

"So, first off, look into the mirror and say, 'sixteen scalawags exclaimed saucily about scallions.' Then we will try to identify anything you did which prevents you from talking more easily."

Jeff picked up the mirror the therapist had laid on the desk and, trying to ignore the funny caricatures around its edges, began, "Sixteen sc-sc-sc-sc-sc-" He stopped abruptly. "But what good is looking in a mirror? I already know what I'm doing."

"Do you?" asked Mr. Clayborne.

"Sure," said Jeff, turning to meet the therapist's hard look. "I know exactly what I'm doing."

"Then how come you haven't changed it?"

"I have."

"To use your favorite word, bull!"

"Yes, I have!"

"All right, maybe you have. But you've only begun."

"Only begun?"

"That's right. You're still deathly afraid of a tele-

phone, and I'd bet a hundred dollars that you couldn't make a simple introduction without stuttering all over the darn place."

"Well, no, but--"

"So, you're not really as far ahead as you think."

"But it's been a month."

"Yes, but you've been building these habits for a good fifteen years. And you don't break the really tough ones without a lot more work than you've already put into this."

"Then why am I doing all this?"

"I don't know. Why are you doing all of this?"

"So, how did the test go?" said Jeff, as Mike slouched through the door.

"It didn't!"

"What do you mean, 'It didn't?'"

Mike gazed steadily at Jeff for ten seconds and then, after a long intake of breath, said, "As you know, Animal Science 317, commonly called Birds 101, is one of the three courses which may be used to fulfill the requirement for a course in biological science. And, for many years, it has been known that said course was an A-B course. You just did not get anything lower.

"But, this year, things changed. Old Doc Kirschner had

died, and they got a new research-type in to teach the course. And this guy is a...a...a...words do not come that are appropriate. Anyway, we walked into this test, expecting it to be rough, but we were totally unprepared for what this monster had concocted."

Jeff's face became mournful, and he gave Mike a sympathetic tap on the shoulder.

"He handed out a sheet with pictures of the feet of one hundred birds. Then he handed out an answer sheet. All we had to do, he said, was identify all one hundred of those pairs of feet.

"I had really studied, for once. I knew all the genres and species of all the birds we had studied. I could have identified them by their heads or wings or calls or maybe even their hind ends. But not their feet!"

"So what happened?"

"I sat there for about ten minutes and was able to figure out half-a-dozen, which was more than Linda or Ann could do. Then I got up from my seat and took the paper up to the teacher.

"When I handed it to him, he said, 'Is this all you're going to do?'

"'This is all I can do,' I answered.

"'What's your name?' he asked.

"And that was the last straw. I sat down, took off my shoes and socks, held my feet up in the air at him and said, 'YOU TELL ME!'"

CHAPTER EIGHT MONDAY EARLY APRIL

"C-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-(silence)-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-

"Push harder, Jeff."

"C-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-(silence)-CARROTS!"

"Good, now do it again."

"Again?"

"Yes, again."

"All right." Jeff shut his eyes, tightened his throat, set his lower jaw, and continued practicing stuttering.

"C-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-(silence)-c-c-c-c-carrots."

"Pretty good, but not as good as the first time."

"Yeah. But what is this helping me to do? I'm doing just the exact thing that I don't want to do when I talk."

"Yes, true. In a way."

"Huh?"

"You appear to be doing the same thing. But you really aren't because you have control over everything you are doing. When you want to press your lips together, you can. When you want to shut your eyes, you can. When you want--"

"To do anything, I can. And so the converse applies equally," Jeff finished.

"Correct. 100 points."

Jeff smiled.

"And now, for the million point question. What is the

point of the whole thing?"

"To show that I can change my speaking behavior. And, then, to get me to do so."

"Right!"

Jeff carefully checked to make certain that he was wearing only his clothes, no jewelry and no possible object in which Mike might have concealed an infernal device such as another bug. Then he headed for the office of the dean.

"Come in," called the dean in his typically cheery way.

"Hello, Dean Carver," said Jeff as he walked through the door and took a seat in front of the dean's desk.

"Well, Jeff. I hated to make you a spy, but I had to find out what was going on. Now then, where has Mike been spending his time?"

"I'm sorry, Dean, but I can't tell you that."

"You what?"

"I can't tell you where Mike has been. Uh, make that won't. I could if I want to, but I do not wish to."

"Why not?" The dean balanced his pipe on his extended finger.

"If I told you that, you'd know everything." Jeff was silent for a second. "Sir, I want you to trust Mike. He knows much more about his parents than you may think. And I

swear to you that he is doing nothing illegal, immoral, or that will in any way endanger him or the school. But I will not tell you how he has been spending his time and money."

"Money?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

"About his business?"

"What kind of business is it?"

"Stevens House of Instant Technology. He fixes radios, repairs televisions, installs extension telephones, builds walkie-talkies, and performs all manner of other electrical and electronic services."

"And I assume he charges for this?"

"Well, it depends. If a frat rat wants something done, it costs him plenty, because Mike hates any type of closed organization. But, if it's a friend, he only charges for parts plus 50¢ an hour. I do all the bookkeeping for him, and so I get anything I want done for free. Plus I have access to his tape deck, stereo and multitude of gadgets."

"I see."

"Anyway, I will never tell you what Mike has been doing."

"Jeff, you must tell me."

"No, sir."

"All right, I'll have to trust you. But if you see Mike headed for any trouble, I'd appreciate a call."

"You'll be the first to know, sir."

"What did you tell him?" Mike demanded.

"Tell who?" said Jeff.

"Come off it. How much did you tell the dean?"

"Nothing. But I did have to tell him about S.H.I.T."

"Mmm. Well, it could have been worse." Mike set his soldering iron down for a moment.

"By the way," said Jeff, "how did you know I was there. You were in lab, supposedly."

"Well, uh, er, I was in lab until I picked up the signal. And then I cut out for my nearest rangefinder, which is in my instructor's office."

"But I wasn't wearing my watch or my billfold."

"Would you believe the old transmitter in the shoe trick?"

"No!"

"Yep."

Jeff slowly removed the receiver from its hook. He thought for a second, then dialed a number.

"Hello. Mason's Hardware."

He struggled to get the first words out.

"Hello?"

"Uh...hello. Um, I'm looking for a special type of sw-sw-sw-swiswi-SWITCH."

"Just a moment. I'll connect you with our electrical department."

"Bu-"

The relays clicked. "Hello."

"Hello. I'm l-l-looking for a cordless sw-sw-switch."

"A what?"

"A sw-sw-sw-sw-(silence)"

"Hello?"

"A sw-sw-sw-sw-sw-sw-(silence)-switch that you can turn off at a distance."

"You mean a control device with extensional override."

"Uh, yeah."

"Sorry, we don't handle that kind of thing anymore."

"Oh. Well, who does?"

"I dunno."

"Well, thanks." He replaced the receiver, glowering at the black thing.

"You're going to do what?"

"We are going to get the proctor."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"Mike, you can't do that. It's not fair. He's never done anything to you personally."

"No, but he's threatened to make me take my stereo out. And, more seriously, he turned Gordie over to the dean for drinking in his room."

"But that's his job."

"Yeah, but Gordie had never had a drink before. And the proc wanted to make an example of him. Which was a rotten thing to do."

"Well, maybe you're right. But what are you going--"

The door suddenly opened, and eight young men hurriedly entered the room.

"Let's move the bastard's stuff all down to the can and set it up there," said a tall, skinny boy.

"Let's glue everything down," said a stocky wrestler.

"Let's glue everything up--on the ceiling," said the short spectacled boy beside him.

"Let's fill the room with newspapers all wadded up," said a medium-sized young man holding a calculus book.

"Let's spray gold paint over everything," said another.

"QUIET!" yelled Mike. "Those have all been done before."

"So?" the group chorused.

"So, we're going to do something different. We are going to fix Stanley so that he'll never forget it."

"How?" said the tall, skinny one.

"Very simple. We're going to give Stanley a large supply of his favorite food, Jello."

"Huh?" said the wrestler.

"We're going to fill him up with Jello. His room, that is."

"The whole thing?" said someone.

"No, just about one foot of it. The area between the floor and the first rung of his chair, which is almost exactly one foot. We are going to lay him a carpet, one foot thick, of orange Jello."

"But--"

"But, nothing. I already have my spies on the lookout for the necessary supplies, and they inform their superior that the food service has just received a new drum of orange Jello. Which they think is in the storage bins. A simple oversight on the part of the food service."

"But--"

"Shut up, you. Now listen, guys. Stanley will be gone next Thursday to an all-day conference on social dynamics. He will leave at noon, and not return until after midnight."

"But we can't do anything in broad daylight," someone objected.

"Wrong. We will meet in here at twelve sharp. Everyone is to bring all of the reasonable size containers he can find. Half-gallon milk cartons are good, so are plastic mop buckets. We will mix up the Jello in here and cool it by the window. At precisely 6:01, when most people are in the dining hall, we will pour the nearly coagulated solution through the window. Since the window is nearly two stories off the ground, we will need the big guys to serve as lifters and the little guys as pourers. The window will be left open. And, when Stanley comes back at or before midnight, he will find a new carpet in his room. Covering anything lying on the floor."

CHAPTER NINE WEDNESDAY

"How's your sex life?" asked the red-haired giant.

"What do you mean, 'How's your sex life?'" Jeff said.

"Just what I said."

"None of your business."

Mr. Clayborne smiled. "Okay, I'm sorry, Jeff. Maybe I shouldn't have used that question. But I wanted to make you mad."

"Why?"

"Because, when you're mad, you don't stutter. And when you're drunk and when you whistle and when you talk to kids and when you're on the stage in a play and when you do anything but talk in a normal situation."

"So?"

"So these are times when you speak 'normally.'"

"But you just said that these situations are abnormal."

"Right. And that's just what I want to talk to you about today. Just what is a normal situation?"

"Well, a normal situation by your definition is any place I stutter."

"In a sense, yes. But there's more to it."

"How?"

"There's more to it because you haven't realized something, yet. You haven't ever asked what you stutter on."

Jeff sat silently for a moment, then took a coin from his pocket and turned it over and over in his fingers. Finally he looked up at the therapist. "Words."

"Words?"

"Words."

"Show me one."

Again Jeff played with the coin. "I can't. That is, there is no physical entity I can pull from my mouth and say, 'Here is a word. Hold onto it.'"

"Exactly. And so all the language we use in stuttering is really quite silly. We talk about blocks on words, word fears and word problems. But what we really are talking about is physical actions which stutterers do which prevent their speaking normally."

"Okay, that makes sense."

"Now, we've been working for some weeks on identifying the things you do which make speech difficult. And, you've succeeded very well in eliminating some of them, although you still have some stuff to work on. And we've also worked on some of the psychological hang-ups stutterers get into, such as avoiding certain situations and certain words and even missing many enjoyable things, all because they're afraid to admit that they're not perfect and that they blunder in their speaking occasionally."

"Um."

"And now your speech is much improved, although you aren't done by any means. So I thought it time that you really did some critical thinking about your problem and just exactly what is involved." And I have an experiment to suggest."

"What?"

"When you go home next vacation, I want you to stutter really badly for the first day, then start to concentrate on feeling what you are saying, instead of listening so intently, then finally use every bit of knowledge you possess on speaking more easily. And I want you to see if anyone notices a change."

"They'll have to."

"Try it and report back next week."

"Check."

"You didn't really do it, Mike. Did you?"

"Yes, I did. I was just getting sick and tired of that son of a female basset hound."

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-(silence)-what was the question?"

"It was like this. I have been taking poly sci courses now for three years just because I liked them. And I've always gotten an A. Until I took 341."

"That's theory of American government, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh. And it's taught by Dr. Kashinsky. A Polish political scientist, yet."

"Mike!"

"All right. I shouldn't have said that. But the guy has some really weird theories. And then on the test, instead of the objective and short answer questions he had indicated he would give, the bastard handed out a sheet of paper with only one essay question on it. The question read, 'It is easily demonstrated that democracy is a superior form of government over communism, though communism is more efficient. Using the works of Engle, Marx, and anyone else, show why this is true. Again, the question is Why?'"

"And you simply wrote down 'BECAUSE!' and walked out?"

"Right."

"Why?"

"Because he had cheated. He had not done what he had said he would do. How in Hell can he talk about freedom and democracy without practicing them himself?"

Jeff warily stepped through the door.

"Hello."

"Uh, hi. I've got something here which I think belongs here in the kitchen."

"Oh?" The food service manager's eyes widened.

"Yeah. But you've got to promise you won't raise a stink about it."

"Okay."

"Here." Jeff deposited a cardboard shoebox on the desk in front of the man. Then, taking off the lid, he proceeded to unroll the towel which had filled the box. As he did this, a series of clinks sounded as various articles of silverware came into view.

"What in the--"

"Now, remember, you promised." And Jeff continued to unwrap the towel. "We had tried for a set of twelve, but the best the guys could do was a service for eight, with serving spoons."

"But how did you do it?"

"It wasn't easy." The towel came to an end as a tiny pickle fork clinked onto the desk.

"I see." The manager's eyes expressed his admiration for the perpetrators of the thefts, though his mouth remained rigid.

"Well, be seeing you," said Jeff.

"I hope not," said the manager.

"Do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do."

Jeff looked over at his roommate, then down at his watch. It read 11:23."

"Do-ti-la-sol-fa-mi-re-do."

"Mike."

"What?"

"What are you doing?"

"Do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-"

"Roommate!"

"Do." Mike paused, and opened his desk drawer. From it he removed an unusual black box. "Watch!"

Jeff looked over at the door as a curious clicking emitted from the lock. Then, almost spookily, the door slowly opened.

"How in the dickens did you do that?"

"Simple. The unit in my hand is a radio transmitter, which is capable of actuating any appropriately modified motor within a range of several miles."

"Okay, so you can unlock your door. But what else can you do with it?"

"Funny you should ask." Mike pushed a series of buttons, resembling a telephone digit dial system. "What I have here is a clever device for signaling any of the several installations on campus, and causing them to perform desirable actions."

"Such as?"

"What time is it?"

"What does that have to do with the topic under discussion?"

"What time is it?"

"It's 11:38."

"Good. Go do something for twenty-one minutes and twenty seconds."

"Now just a minute. Y-y-you went through all that rigamarole for some reason. Why do I have to come back in twenty-one minutes and twenty seconds for the third act?"

"Twenty-one minutes and fifteen seconds," Mike said.

"You win," said Jeff, rising from his chair and heading for the door.

"Don't forget," his roommate called as Jeff headed down the hall in search of a bridge game to kibitz for twenty minutes, which slowly sank into oblivion as Jeff watched two bridge hands murdered by players whom he had thought he had taught better. Then, with his watch signalling two minutes of midnight, he returned to the room where Mike had set up his tape recorder and his radio.

"What the--"

"Shh. Just listen."

One minute and twenty seconds passed, then the sonorous

bells of the clock tower began their hourly tolling. First there was an introductory passage, then the steady, sure beats. One for each hour.

"Four, five," Jeff counted silently to himself.

"Six, seven," Mike counted aloud.

"Eight, nine."

"Ten, eleven."

"Twelve."

"Boom," Mike echoed, as the clock struck one more time than usual.

"Mike, that was thirteen booms."

"Ssh." Mike twisted the dials of his radio until the static fairly flooded the room. Then, a squawk of the radio produced a sound which made Mike clap his hands together with glee.

"Car four, calling car four, over."

"This is car four. Over."

"Please check out a report of the campus bell tower having struck thirteen times. The dean has requested we send units to investigate suspicious activity in the area."

"Roger. Ten-four."

Click. The tape recorder stopped as Mike pushed a button. Then, setting the device so that any incoming signal would reactivate it, he turned to Jeff and smiled.

"That is what I wanted on tape. So that no one can deny that the clock really struck thirteen times. And now I've got it."

"And now we've got you," said a bass voice from the doorway.

Mike and Jeff turned to see the dean, the house proctor and a police officer standing at the door.

"Hello, there," said Mike. "Have a chair. We've been listening to some very interesting radio programs."

"Mr. Stevens." The dean's voice made the loose transistors sitting on Mike's desk rattle. "I will see you tomorrow morning in my office. At nine o'clock."

"Why, I'd be glad to come, sir," said Mike. "But I've got calculus on Friday morning at nine."

"Thursday morning, Mr. Stevens. It may technically be Thursday morning now but, to us mortals, it is still Wednesday night. Late Wednesday night!"

"But you said tomo-"

"Thursday, Mr. Stevens."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER TEN THURSDAY

"Well, here goes nothing," said Mike, knocking on the dean's office door. He turned to look at Jeff.

"Come in, Mr. Stevens," said the now familiar voice.

Mike pushed open the door, waited for Jeff to pass through ahead of him, then followed suit and closed the door after himself.

"Have a seat, gentlemen." The dean turned to Jeff. "Why did you come along?"

"Because, sir, I think that Mike needs someone to speak in his defense. I know that he won't do it himself."

"He insisted on coming," Mike said. "I didn't ask for a defense attorney."

"I see," said Dean Carver. He looked at Mike, then slowly began to speak. "Mr. Stevens, unless I am given very good reason to the contrary, tomorrow will be your last day here at Simon Masters College. I will, unless convinced otherwise in the next few minutes, recommend to the student senate that you be expelled from our college as of Friday afternoon at four o' clock." The dean paused for breath. "Do I make myself clear, Mr. Stevens?"

"Yep," said Mike.

"Furthermore, you will not be able to re-enroll in this college until one calendar year has passed. And it may be

very difficult to enroll in any other school because your record will follow you wherever you go."

"Dean?" Jeff said.

"Yes."

"Would you care to list the reasons for Mike's dismissal?"

The dean looked at Jeff for a second, then began. "The first is the incident of last evening. Now it may not be illegal or against the college code to make the bell tower chime thirteen times. In fact, it may be rather amusing to some people."

"Then, wh-"

"But, access to that tower is gained only through the door at its base. And this door is kept heavily padlocked. It is further provided with its own Yale lock. To get into the tower, in other words, you must have a key. And that is one of the school rules which, broken, guarantee immediate expulsion from our school."

Jeff had pulled a small notebook from his pocket and was carefully taking notes. "I see," he said.

"Second, comes the incident of the orange Jello poured through the proctor's window and allowed to set on his floor. Again, another of the school rules was violated." The dean reached over to his bookrack and took from it a copy of the

student handbook. "I quote, 'Any student engaged in harassing any proctor shall be subject to immediate disciplinary action. If, at any time, the students feel that a proctor is not pursuing a fair course of action, they should place their written opinions with the dean. Personal vendettas will not be tolerated.'"

"But it wasn't a personal vendetta," said Mike. "It was to teach the son of a bi--"

"Please continue, sir," Jeff interrupted.

"Third, there is the incident of the power outage."

"But no one was injured in any way," said Jeff.

"That's not the point," the dean said. "In the first place, the power station is also kept locked. And this provides us with a second access gained by unauthorized use of a key. In addition, the men involved were required to enter several other buildings after dark. This generally is known as breaking and entering, which is legally punishable as a felony."

"But--" objected Mike.

"However, even if we discount this, there is the one grave trouble which could have happened." The dean lit his pipe. "Suppose Mike had made a mistake. Suppose he had cut the power to the hospital? Or suppose he had overloaded some circuit somewhere so that a fire were caused? Or sup-

pose that he had been injured or killed? What then?"

Jeff wrote industriously in his notebook. Mike pulled a piece of string from his pocket and began to form an intricate string figure.

"Fourth, there is the matter of the stolen silverware. And that is the reason which most immediately comes to mind for your disciplinary action," said the dean directly to Mike.

"But we gave all the shi--"

"Shut up, Mike," said Jeff. He looked at the dean and said, "Is there anything else, sir?"

"Yes, there is. I have a list of over forty incidents, either directed by or involving Mr. Stevens. This, however, was the first time that we could pin it on him without any question."

"Pin it on me!" shouted Mike. "Why, you crummy old fossil, I've done more for your God-damned school in the way of excitement than old Masters himself. I was the one who broke the frats stranglehold on who would perform at concerts. I was the one who finally got the lake to drain properly, although it was a pain setting up the dynamite in just the right places. I was the one who got your stinking fountain cleaned out of all the algae, by using a little good old bubblebath."

"Mike, please let the dean finish," said Jeff.

Mike returned to his chair, from which he had arisen to pace around the room as he gave his first big speech.

"Oh, all right," said Mike, sitting down once more.

The dean sat back in his chair. "But what concerns us the most is not Mike's breaking the rules. We know that no one has ever been harmed when Mike was involved in a stunt. But it is his continual disregard for rules and regulations that bothers us."

Jeff looked at his roommate.

"No comment," said Mike.

"All right. Let's hear from you then," said the dean, as he turned to Jeff.

Jeff turned back to the first page of his notes. Then, after looking at them for a few moments, began. "Well, let us proceed this way." He paused to clear his throat. His heart beat faster. "N-n-now I've known Mike for almost three years, and I've been his roommate for two and a half of those years. So I probably know him about as well as any of the other people on this campus."

"Granted," said the dean.

Mike raised one side of his mouth into a smile position.

"I also have taken a half dozen courses with him, and so I know his academic ability. Which is quite amazing."

"Granted, also," said the dean.

"And so I feel I can say that Mike is one of the most talented people I know."

"That line sounds familiar," said the dean.

"But I know more than that. And I am going to try and p-p-p-(silence)-put it into words."

The other two participants in the discussion looked expectantly at Jeff.

"Now we all know, Mike included, that his father and mother died when he was a small child. We also know that he lived with relatives until he was seventeen and that you, Dean Carver, were appointed his guardian, although you never told Mike. You did, however, see that he came to college at SMC.

"And from then on you treated him just like any other student. Which must have been difficult in view of your obvious interest in and love for Mike. And, although Mike did not know it, you and your wife were to act as guardian angels for some time. It was you who arranged his Christmas vacations with various faculty members, etc.

"But we must now consider Mike's various offenses, some of which are, by sch-sch-school rules, very serious. Quite serious enough to require his expulsion."

The dean nodded his head. Mike said nothing.

"Regarding gaining access to the tower and other buildings, I would say that Mike is saved by a technicality. The technicality is that the school rule book says that you may not have unauthorized keys. And Mike doesn't. He used his own, hand-built, lockpicks."

The dean said nothing. Mike smiled.

"Whether this is considered breaking and entering, I do not know. But that makes it a criminal court case, and I do not really see the school pursuing the thing that far, since Mike caused no damage and, in the case of the re-wiring, did the school a major favor."

Mike continued smiling.

"In the matter of Robert Stanley, proctor to second floor Magdalen Hall, I can only give my own opinion. And my feeling is that Stanley deserved what he got.

"I think so, because I saw him drink in his room more than once, threaten to make guys take their stereos home when his own radio was usually tuned to a raucous country station and playing at full volume, cheat on exams, and even cuss some poor schnook out whose girl was a little late getting out of the dorm--right in front of the girl."

"But his job is to maintain order," said the dean.

"Bull. His real job is to maintain order while acting as a help to the guys on his hall, and especially acting as

an example for them to follow. Stanley not only wasn't an example, he seemed to go out of his way to be nasty. Fortunately, his grades were so low last quarter that he had to give up his job. But he might have been cheerfully murdered if he hadn't."

"But Mike is still guilty, according to the student handbook," insisted the dean.

"Again, bull. Mike had very carefully stayed out of Stanley's way. He didn't want to get kicked out of school for seeming to harass a proctor. But I could tell that he hated Stanley's whole attitude. And when our best friend, Jerry Gordon, was turned over to the academic council, that was the last straw.

"Mike had said that if Stanley ever really hurt someone, particularly someone like Gordie who had never had a beer in his life until that night and was simply walking to the head in order to dump out the contents of a half fu--"

"But he was drinking in the dorm," the dean insisted.

"NO, GOD DAMN IT, HE WAS NOT DRINKING IN THE DORM!"

"Mike! Sit down and shut up," said Jeff. "No, as my roommate says, he was not drinking in the dorm. What had happened was that Gordie and three other guys had bought two six packs, gone out into the country, and drunk their beer.

"Gordie had had only half a can, then had given it to

one of the other guys who was drinking. This guy put the half can in Gordie's pocket, when they had gotten back to the room. And Gordie found it about one a.m. So he waited until he figured the hallway was empty, then quietly walked down the hall to pour the can of beer down the toilet. But the proc hadn't gone to bed; he had stayed up for a phone call and just happened to step out of his room as Gordie walked by."

"And the bastard turned him over to the academic council for doing exactly what he himself would have done in an identical situation."

"Why was I never informed of this?" demanded the dean.

"Because," said Jeff, "it was only a first offense. And these are handled by the office of proctors and the student senate."

"I see." The dean thought a second. "But didn't Mr. Gordon get a raw deal?"

"Yes, he did. But he only got campused for a week and made an example of. It could have been much worse."

"But if I had known..."

"Yeah, right," said Mike.

"Regardless, sir, the point was that this man Stanley really deserved what he got." Jeff stopped to consult his notes. "Besides, Mike sent an anonymous gift of twenty-five

dollars to the food service to cover the cost of the Jello."

"I see," said the dean.

"And as far as the silverware goes, we not only returned all the silverware we had stolen, which had been our original intention anyway, but we returned over three dozen pieces which we liberated from their new owners. We, so to speak, stole back some of your missing silverware. And we even polished it up for you."

"Yeah, polished it with junk that costs seventy-nine cents for a crummy little jar," said Mike.

The dean sighed. "What about the power failure? What if something serious had gone wrong?"

Jeff looked squarely at the dean. "But nothing did go wrong. And Mike had a complete wiring diagram of the campus in order to make absolutely certain that nothing could go wrong."

The dean straightened up in his chair, looked at Jeff, then gazed at Mike for a full minute. "I'm very sorry," he said at last. "Your defense was brilliant, worthy of Darrow, but not adequate in this case. Mike simply has broken too many rules. I couldn't overlook all of these incidents even if I wanted to."

Jeff sat back in his chair then, defeated. And Mike continued playing with his piece of string, which he had now

rigged into a complicated pulley system through the use of three pencils of the dean's and a small paper weight which also belonged to the dean.

The dean began to stand in order to dismiss the boys when Jeff suddenly said, "Wait a minute. I know something that will change the situation!"

The dean relaxed, and said, "What is it?"

Mike turned to Jeff and, with eyes wide open, said, "If you tell him what I think you are going to tell him, I'll leave right now. And I won't ever come back."

"Don't be stupid, Mike. You love this place, and I know it. You'd die to keep this campus together. You just can't stand to receive praise from anyone. Now grow up and shut up."

"Mike, please sit down," said the dean.

Mike looked first at Jeff, then at the dean. Then, shakily, said, "A-a-all right. I will."

"Go ahead, Jeff," said the dean.

"Okay." He took a long breath. "Mike has been the school's champion of democracy. He showed this by sticking up for Gordie. He showed it when he beat the frat council's nominee for the student senate when he gave that speech of his on the lawn after chapel. He showed it when he jeopardized his own grade in poly sci 341. He showed it in the

zoology test, which everyone has heard about. But, most impressively, he showed it at the Edgewood Home for Boys."

"The Edgewood what?" said the dean.

"The Edgewood Home for Boys, sir," said Mike. "It's a place where they send kids who don't have any foster home."

"I see," said the dean. "Problem children."

"Wrong. Children with problems. And that's an entirely different kind of thing."

"I beg your pardon."

"Problem children, by definition, can only be trained or institutionalized. But children with problems can be helped to solve their problems. It's a nasty semantic trap."

"How do you know all of this?" asked the dean.

"Simple," said Mike. "I read a book on it. In fact, I read several, including Freud, Jung, Adler, and Rogers."

"Excuse me," said Jeff, "but this isn't exactly the case at hand."

"True," said the dean. "All right," he turned to Jeff, "tell me the pertinent facts."

"Well, it's like this. Mike has been spending a large part of four afternoons a week at Edgewood. I had originally thought he spent it studying or with Linda Sue. But I learned that this was impossible because Linda Sue kept calling up in the afternoon trying to find him. And I knew

that he wasn't studying because Mike just doesn't have to study that hard. Besides, he wouldn't spend four straight afternoons doing so even if he did have to study.

"So I became very curious and even tried to follow him. But he's read enough detective books that he knew how to escape my amateurish surveillance. I didn't want to ask him, so I let it ride. Until two weeks ago, when you called me.

"And, as you now know, I did find out where Mike was going. He showed me, on the promise that I would not tell you. And I didn't."

"I understand, now," said the dean.

"Anyway, Mike would go over there and play the guitar, which he does beautifully, and help the kids with their lessons. For nothing. He didn't receive a dime."

Mike's face was blank, as though his soul had been bared and his threshold of pain long since passed.

"You see, dean, school isn't enough for Mike. He, like most of us, needs people. And he felt that he was not getting the experiences he really wanted by going to classes. And, since he can easily pass any course, he decided to do other things--positive things."

"But why all the stunts, then?" said Dean Carver.

"Well, sir, most were not just stunts; they served a useful purpose such as retrieving some of the college's new

silverware. And a few, such as the power outage, were simply ways for Mike to prove to himself that he could really do the fantastic things that he wanted all of us to think that he could do."

"Pardon?"

"Ever since he's been four years old, Mike has had to depend on himself. And he developed a tremendous compensation for his feelings of inadequacy; the compensation was that of out-bragging and out-thinking anyone else. And that's the whole story." Jeff sat back, exhausted.

The dean looked at Mike. "Mr. Stevens, I can only say that I'm overwhelmed by these revelations. And I agree with your roommate that you should be allowed to remain here."

Mike said nothing.

"But I will have to make a report to the trustees on this unusual action. I also request that you refrain from your usual stunts, at least for a while."

Mike nodded, "Okay."

"And thank you, sir," said Jeff, rising and smiling.

"My pleasure," said the dean. And he shook Jeff's hand, followed by Mike's hand. "Let me know if I can help you in the future."

"We will," said Jeff, as he crossed the threshold of the door he had just opened.

"We will," Mike echoed.

Back in the room, Mike extended a hand. "Thanks."

"Sure," Jeff smiled, "that's what roommates are f-for."

"Yeah, right," said Mike. A moment passed. "By the way, you hardly stuttered at all back there."

"I know." Jeff reached for the phone and began to dial a long un-called number.

"Hello?"

"Hello. This is Jeff N-nichols. May I speak to Ann Phillips, please?"

"This is she."

"Oh. Well, hi, Ann. How are you?"

"Fine, thank you. And how are you, Jeff?"

"Just great. In fact, if you'd like to go out for a cup of coffee this evening, I'll tell you all about it."

"Golly, Jeff, I've already got a date for tonight."

"Oh."

"But I could be talked into a late afternoon coke."

"Really?" Jeff nearly dropped the phone.

"Yes, really."

"Well, that would be great. Uh, how about f-f-four-thirty?"

"That would be fine."

"I'll meet you at the door of the Union, down by the fountain. Okay?"

"Fine. See you then."

"Right."

"Bye."

"Goodbye." Jeff hung up the telephone, a smile gently crossing his lips.

A moment passed. R-r-ring.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Jeffrey. This is your mother."

"Oh."

"I thought I'd call and let you know what has been happening around home."

"Oh."

"We've decided to come up for parent's day this year. We've never seen your room, and we want to meet some of your friends."

"Well, uh, golly, Mom. I didn't plan on you coming. I think I'm going out that night with Ann because of the dance."

"I see. Well, would you mind if a couple of old foggy parents came along and watched? We didn't know you were still dating Ann."

Jeff scratched his hair. "Okay, Mom. And, by the way,

I've got someone I want you to meet. He'll be there, and you'll really like him a lot."

"Who is this, Jeff?"

"Well, uh, I'll explain when you get here. But I'll give you a hint. He's a real magician."

"Jeffrey, do you feel well?"

"I'm just fine, Mother. And I'll see you Saturday night. Okay?"

"All right. Your father sends his love."

"Right. Goodbye, Mom."

"Goodbye."

CHAPTER ELEVEN FRIDAY

"What's this?" said Mr. Clayborne, as Jeff handed him a neatly typed sheet of paper.

"It's a descriptive passage I wrote the other night, while thinking about my speech to give to the dean," said Jeff.

"What speech?"

"Read the paragraph first, then I'll explain."

"Okay. Mind if I read it aloud?"

"No, go ahead."

"My eyes close to blot out the other faces and my lips feel dry as breath ceases to flow over them. My tongue arches upward trying to reach the roof of my mouth; the silence explodes on my eardrums. I suck in air swiftly and push once more against the formless granite block which prevents speech. Ever so slowly the barrier dissolves as lungs release dead air and the tip of my tongue meets the hard backside of my upper front teeth. It descends and my lips close to form a 'b' then quickly open for air to escape between my teeth as I finally say 'clubs.'" The therapist laid the paper on his desk. "That's good, Jeff. That's really good. May I copy it and send it in to my professional journal?"

"Well, uh..."

"Please?"

"Okay."

"Fine, thanks. Now then, about this meeting with Dean Carver?"

"Well, it was really about my roommate, who was going to get kicked out of school. I was his defense lawyer."

"Did you win?"

"Yep. And I only st-st-stuttered a half dozen times in almost half an hour. And even these were easy, short repetitions."

"Very good."

"So I think I'm doing real well but, as you said once, I'm not done yet. I'll continue with you until we both feel sure the problem is solved."

"That's fine, Jeff. In fa--"

"And last, but not least, I called up Ann to ask her for a date."

"Did she accept?"

"Boy, did she. We went out for a Coke, then talked so long we missed supper. She had to go then, because she'd promised to go to the movies with another guy. But as soon as she got back, she called me and we talked until two a.m."

"Sounds good."

"Yeah. We're going to the dance together, then out for

pizza on Saturday. My folks are coming up, too, for the dance and Parents Day."

"Good."

"Ann and I really have a lot to talk about, especially my speech."

"Your speech?"

"Yeah. She's really fascinated by all this, and she's even talking about taking your introductory course in speech pathology."

"No kidding?" said the red-haired giant.

"No kidding," Jeff replied.

"That's wonderful," said Mr. Clayborne, as he pulled open his desk drawer and removed a pack of cards. He spread them face-up on the table and said, "I've been practicing a new one, Jeff. Think of a card, any one at all."

"You're joking," said Jeff.

"No, no," the therapist replied. "Just think of one."

"But you can't find it if I only think of it."

"Try me," said Mr. Clayborne. "Try me."